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Del. Brown Celebrated After Duty In Baghdad

By John Wagner
Washington Post Staff Writer
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They streamed to Del. Anthony G. Brown's Prince George's County neighborhood by the dozens yesterday to pay tribute to the Army Reservist recently returned from Iraq.

Friends and neighbors. Colleagues from the Maryland House of Delegates. Other politicians with aspirations, including the two Democrats running for governor next year. And even a few strangers, such as Delores Lee.

"Anybody goes to Iraq and serves there, they deserve to be honored," said Lee, an Air Force budget analyst who learned of the event and decided to make the 15-minute drive to Mitchellville for Brown's "Welcome Back From Iraq Block Party."

For close to four hours, Brown, the affable House majority whip, stood in the sun on a blocked-off street outside his brown brick home, greeting guests with handshakes and hugs. Many noted how thin and fit Brown looked as he shared stories about his nine months in the war-torn country, which started with 112-degree morning heat upon touchdown at Baghdad International Airport.

"It could have been worse," Brown told one group about his tenure as a U.S.-appointed consultant to Iraq's Ministry of Displacement and Migration. "In Baghdad, it's all bad, but it could have been worse."

As guests rounded the block, they were greeted by a tableau of Americana: picnic tables with American flags as centerpieces, kids roaming from face-painting to potato sack races, and a soul band's gentle sounds on a breezy afternoon.

With Brown's days in Iraq behind him, there was also plenty of buzz about what his political future might hold.

The Harvard University-educated lawyer is frequently mentioned as a possible lieutenant governor candidate for either Montgomery County Executive Douglas M. Duncan (D) or Baltimore Mayor Martin O'Malley (D). Duncan was among the early arrivals yesterday, and O'Malley put in an extended appearance.

Shortly after returning to Maryland last month, Brown let it be known that he is also considering other possibilities, including next year's U.S. Senate race. Rep. Benjamin L. Cardin (D-Baltimore), who has declared his Senate candidacy, was among those who mingled at yesterday's event and stepped up to the microphone to praise Brown for serving the nation during "a critical period in his family's life."

Brown said yesterday that he has not ruled out running for reelection next year, either, and that he has no timetable to make a decision.

The guests included many of Brown's House colleagues, several of whom suggested that his political potential should not be underestimated.

"Even before this, he was on course to do great things," said Del. Murray D. Levy (D-Charles). "But I think anytime you serve your country, you enhance your stature."

Brown said he was humbled by the show of support.

"I know that I had a lot of support because I got a lot of e-mail and care packages," he said. "But today I'm getting quite a visual sense of that."

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Del. Anthony G. Brown, an Army Reservist, hugs Helen Barnett at a block party in Mitchellville to welcome him home after nine months in Iraq.

Photo Credit: By Tetona Dunlap -- The Washington Post Photo

Most Viewed Photos (9:00 a.m. ET)

- This NOAA satellite image taken Sunday, Sept. 4, 2005 at 2:45 am EDT shows Tropical Storm Maria spinning far out in the Atlantic. The storm is not supposed to effect any major landmasses. Any area of denser clouds can be seen over the Upper Midwest and is associated with thunderstorm and thunderstorm warnings. Some low level clouds can be seen over the Northeast and Southeast, but the majority of the area is mostly clear.
- A dead body floats in front of a house on the east side of New Orleans, LA., in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina Saturday, Sept. 3, 2005. Gov. Kathleen Blanco said Saturday that she expected the death toll to reach the thousands. (AP Photo/Phil Coale)
- Evacuees shield their eyes as a Black Hawk helicopter lands on an Interstate 10 overpass in New Orleans. Many city residents sought refuge on freeways as floodwaters rose around them.